STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Budget Change Proposal - Cover Sheet
DF-46 (REV 03/25)

Fiscal Year	Business Unit Number	Department
2026-27	3540	Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Hyperion Budget Request Name	Relevant Program or Subprogram
3540-005-BCP-2026-BCP	2465019-Fire Control

Budget Request Title
Fixed-Wing Pilot and Mechanics Contract Increases

Budget Request Summary
The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests up to $66,508,000 in fiscal year 2026-27 through 2028-29, $69,636,000 in 2029-30, and $74,149,000 ongoing from the General Fund for fixed-wing pilot and mechanics contract cost increases. The final requested amount for the contract cost increases will not be known until the final contract amounts are available concurrent with the finalization of an Intent to Award. However, these amounts reflect the anticipated maximum potential increase. CAL FIRE will formally notify the Department of Finance of the final contract cost increases once they become known, and an update to this proposal may be needed during the Spring process to reconcile it to the final contract amounts.

Requires Legislation (submit required legislation with the BCP)	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed
☐ Trailer Bill Language ☐ Budget Bill Language ☒ N/A	

Does this BCP contain information technology (IT) components? ☐ Yes ☒ No	Department CIO	Date

For IT requests, specify the project number, the most recent project approval document (FSR, SPR, S1BA, S2AA, S3SD, S4PRA), the approval date, and the total project cost.

Project No. **Approval Date:**

Project Approval Document: **Total Project Cost:**

If proposal affects another department, does other department concur with proposal? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Prepared By	Date	Reviewed By	Date
Steve Robinson	1/8/2026	Jake Sjolund	1/8/2026
Department Director	**Date**	**Agency Secretary**	**Date**
Joe Tyler	1/8/2026	Wade Crowfoot	1/8/2026

Department of Finance Use Only

Additional Review: ☐ Capital Outlay ☐ ITCU ☐ FSCU ☐ OSAE ☐ Dept. of Technology

Principal Program Budget Analyst	Date submitted to the Legislature
Vy Nguyen	1/9/2026

A. Problem Statement

The Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests up to $66,508,000 in 2026-27 through 2028-29, $69,636,000 in 2029-30, and $74,149,000 ongoing from the General Fund for fixed-wing pilot and mechanics contract cost increases. The final requested amount for the contract cost increases will not be known until the final contract amounts are available concurrent with the finalization of an Intent to Award. However, these amounts reflect the anticipated maximum potential increase. CAL FIRE will formally notify the Department of Finance of the contract cost increases once they become known, and an update to this proposal may be needed during the Spring process to reconcile it to the final contract amounts. Historically, each follow-on contract for these vendor services exceeds the CAL FIRE baseline budget, resulting in the need for additional funding for the new contract costs covering the fiscal years of the contract.

CAL FIRE's Aviation Management Unit provides aviation assets and performs scheduled routine maintenance on the Department's aerial fleet throughout the fire year. In December 2001, the state deemed it necessary to contract with aviation logistical support companies to provide personnel for the operation and maintenance of the state's fleet of firefighting aircraft. State officers monitor each contractor's performance to ensure contract compliance, safety, and security of state assets, provide general direction, and set priorities for program operation. Each follow-on contract goes through a competitive procurement process to ensure the provision of vital components and services necessary to maintain the fleet without interruptions or delays. Under this type of contract, services, overhauls, and repairs are identified, sent to approved vendors, and returned in compliance with aviation standards.

Fixed-Wing Pilot and Mechanics Contract History

Amentum Services Inc. currently provides pilots to operate fixed-wing aircraft and mechanics for the maintenance of the Department's fixed-wing and rotary fleet. Maintenance mechanics are employed year-round, performing all maintenance in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration guidelines as well as necessary repairs during the fire year to ensure aircraft availability. Maintenance occurs throughout the year, with the heaviest emphasis in the traditional winter and spring months. During the winter months, maintenance mechanics conduct aircraft maintenance, repairs, overhauls, and modifications/manufacturing of airframes, engines, propellers, helicopter rotating components, and various aircraft parts and components. The Amentum contract ensures that vital components and services necessary to maintain the fleet are provided without interruptions or delays.

The 2016 Budget Act supported three firm years and two optional years for the increased contractual costs of a follow-on aviation fixed-wing pilot and aviation fleet mechanics contract, enabling continued operation and maintenance of the aviation fleet with contract staff through 2020-21.

The 2018 Budget Act provided additional funding through 2023-24 for contracted mechanics as well as related support and equipment for 12 new Sikorsky S-70i Helicopters. The 2018 Budget Act also provided additional funding through 2022-23 for contracted pilots to fly Aerial Supervision Module aircraft and to provide assistance and direction to Large and Very Large Air Tankers (LATs and VLATs) during their wildland firefighting missions, enhancing aerial supervision and coordination capabilities.

The 2019 Budget Act provided additional funding through 2024-25 for contracted mechanics and related support equipment for seven new C-130H LATs, in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act of 2019, along with Memoranda of Understanding between CAL FIRE and the United States Coast Guard. In December of 2023, the partnership with the Coast Guard was dissolved, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2024, and CAL FIRE is now solely responsible for maintaining the airworthiness of the aircraft as they complete Retardant Delivery System (RDS) installation. As of December 2025, three of the seven C-130Hs are operational, with a fourth on track to enter service in May 2026. While awaiting RDS installation,

CAL FIRE operates the aircraft to train and maintain proficiency of C-130H air tanker flight and maintenance crews, which is essential for operational preparedness when the aircraft enter service as CAL FIRE LATs. Maintaining this operational readiness requires trained contract personnel to support and complete required calendar inspections and replacement of components at the end of their lifespan. Continuing infrastructure integral to C-130H maintenance support are parts and tool rooms, procurement, shipping and receiving, logistics control, warehousing, accounting, hazardous materials control, safety, and quality control.

The 2021 Budget Act provided funding to support the incrementally increased follow-on contract costs for the fixed-wing pilots and aviation fleet mechanics through the end of the three firm years (i.e., 2023-24) of the contract with the existing vendor. The 2023 Budget Act provided funding to support the incrementally increased follow-on contract costs for the fixed-wing pilots and aviation fleet mechanics through the end of the option years (i.e., 2025-26) of the contract with the existing vendor.

The 2024 Budget Act provided $14.5 million in ongoing funding to ensure airbases and helitack bases have sufficient support for aviation maintenance, logistics, and pilot contracts, thereby extending aviation operation timeframes and aligning them with a nine-month operational period. This included additional aviation mechanic support to ensure that annual fleet maintenance and repairs can occur so that aircraft are available on an extended basis. This plan included an increase in contracts for firefighting retardant support to ensure contracted personnel are available to mix and pump retardant when the Department requires it. Aviation support and maintenance costs will continue to increase to support existing aircraft maintenance and logistics contracts as the fire year continues to worsen due to climate change.

B. Justification

CAL FIRE operates the largest civil aerial wildland fire suppression fleet in the world. It is the Department's responsibility to ensure that there are no interruptions in maintenance activities necessary to keep the aircraft flying and that scheduled routine maintenance is performed annually. The aircraft assists with the Department's goal to suppress 95 percent of all fires at ten acres or less by maintaining an aggressive initial attack capability. CAL FIRE's tactical aircraft fleet provides support to ground crews, helping to slow a fire's progression by allowing engines and crews to complete the suppression process.

The additional funding requested in this proposal is necessary for the follow-on contracted services of fixed-wing pilot and mechanics contract cost increases. Because of the expanding aviation program and an increase in the frequency and severity of wildfires, there is a greater need for aerial firefighting. This requires more pilots to operate fixed-wing aircraft for fire suppression as well as maintenance mechanics for the Department's fixed-wing and rotary fleet. As the demand for skilled pilots and maintenance mechanics rises, so do the wages and benefits needed to attract and retain qualified personnel. Additionally, more frequent and intensive use of aircraft due to increased wildfire activity results in higher maintenance and repair costs. Vendors must ensure that aircraft are in top condition, which requires more labor and time, increasing the overall cost of the contract.

CAL FIRE is unable to redirect funding of this magnitude out of its fire protection base budget for the cost increases necessary to maintain this core aviation operations services contract. This augmentation is particularly critical given the year-over-year trend in ignitions and acreage burned. To provide proper protection of the State Responsibility Area, the Department must have sufficient funding for the increased costs of this contract. The increased funding specified in this request will ensure that there are no interruptions to maintenance activities necessary to keep the aircraft flying, that scheduled routine maintenance is performed during the winter months as is historic practice, and that emergency unscheduled maintenance can be performed in a timely manner.

C. Departmentwide and Statewide Considerations

This proposal is consistent with the following goals and objectives in CAL FIRE's 2024 Strategic Plan:

Goal 6: Identify core capabilities and strengthen operational capacity.

Objective 6.1: Ensure the Department has the resources and infrastructure to adapt to evolving operational demands and legal frameworks.

D. Outcomes and Accountability

The additional funding will provide adequate services to support aviation resources and ensure the safety of the public who rely on fire protection services from CAL FIRE.

E. Implementation Plan

Upon enactment of the 2026 Budget Act, funding will be made available to pay contract invoices.

F. Supplemental Information (If Applicable)

None.

BCP Fiscal Detail Sheet

(Dollars in Thousands)

BCP Title: Fixed-Wing Pilot and Mechanics Contract Increases

BR Name: 3540-005-BCP-2026-GB

Budget Request Summary

Operating Expenses and Equipment

Operating Expenses and Equipment	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
5340 - Consulting and Professional Services - External	0	66,508	66,508	66,508	69,636	74,149
Total Operating Expenses and Equipment	**$0**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$69,636**	**$74,149**

Total Budget Request

Total Budget Request	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total Budget Request	**$0**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$69,636**	**$74,149**

Fund Summary

Fund Source

Fund Source	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
State Operations - 0001 - General Fund	0	66,508	66,508	66,508	69,636	74,149
Total State Operations Expenditures	**$0**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$69,636**	**$74,149**
Total All Funds	**$0**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$69,636**	**$74,149**

Program Summary

Program Funding

Program Funding	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
2465019 - Fire Control	0	66,508	66,508	66,508	69,636	74,149
Total All Programs	**$0**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$66,508**	**$69,636**	**$74,149**